

### **Draft letter to elected officials**

Everyone knows that clean water is essential for our health, and is especially critical for our children. Cold, clean water is also essential to the health of our fish and shellfish.

But what's far less well-known is that many farming practices commonly used in our state practices send harmful pollutants into our waterways, which are degrading our water, destroying vital habitat and endangering our fish.

Farming right to the edge of our streams allows pesticides, fertilizers, and land-applied manure to enter into our waterways, and is Washington's largest source of stream pollution.

This is because our state has no permit system in place to regulate many agricultural practices. Unlike other industries, protecting our waterways from polluted run-off is voluntary for the agriculture industry, and farmers are merely encouraged to use "best management practices."

***The voluntary approach that has been tried for decades is insufficient.*** When public opinion research shows that three-quarters of Washingtonians support stronger laws protecting the health of our water resources in Washington, and most Washingtonians believe that protecting our water resources is even more important than growing our economy, it is time to recognize that voluntary approaches alone are not working and the public is ready to prioritize strong water resource protection.

One effective solution is the establishment of streamside buffers. Other industries that work with the land, such as timber harvesters and developers, are required to use streamside buffers to prevent stream pollution. Adequate buffers can help the agriculture industry do its part to protect our water resources, too. The science is overwhelming: one-hundred feet of natural vegetation between farmland and our waterways would keep most pesticides, fertilizers, cows and manure out of our streams, and it would promote healthy habitat for our fish.

This issue has received little attention from the Legislature to date, but should. Fully two-thirds of Washingtonians support 100-foot natural buffers between agriculture lands and streams.

It's time to clean up our streams, for healthy fish, healthy farms and healthy families. State government must hold the agricultural industry to the same level of responsibility as other industries in order to keep our rivers fishable, swimmable and drinkable for years to come.

Sincerely,

### **KUOW underwriting advertisement copy**

Support for KUOW comes from What's Upstream dot com, a coalition of Washington clean water advocates working to protect salmon rivers and streams by addressing agricultural pollution as a major cause of pollution in salmon bearing streams. Clean water in Puget Sound starts with clean water upstream. More at What's upstream dot com.